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Waucoma Twilight: Generations of the Farm

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Hurt uses published histories for most of his data and cites census reports and similar material. He makes limited use of manuscripts from midwestern collections and draws upon many sources for his outstanding illustrations. The book is an excellent introduction to a subject that will draw more attention in coming years.

Waucoma Twilight: Generations of the Farm, by Dona Schwartz. Smithsonian Series in Ethnographic Inquiry. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. x, 164 pp. Illustrations, tables, references, index. \$24.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY DEBORAH FINK, AMES, IOWA

Rural communities across the country have been losing population, many to the point of dissolution. *Waucoma Twilight* portrays a rural Iowa community undergoing the changes that continue to transform rural culture. Dona Schwartz, a photographer and journalist, took a series of photographs depicting work, civic, and leisure activities in Waucoma and asked the people to reflect on them. The book presents a collection of 220 black-and-white illustrations; much of the text consists of transcripts of taped interviews with members of five farm families with roots of varying length in the area. Some written accounts, old photographs, and census materials are used, but the book's history comes largely through recollections of young and old adults living in the community in the years from 1985 to 1987 when Schwartz was photographing and interviewing.

Schwartz, linked to a local family by marriage, puts herself in the narrative, clarifying her involvement in shaping the emerging picture. She identifies social institutions—Waucoma itself, families, clubs, churches, and farms—which become chapters of the book. Chapters on auctions, leisure, and the rural-urban continuum document other aspects of the culture. The emphasis throughout the text is on change: how it was when the interviewee was young, how it is now, feelings about the change, and plans for the future.

Waucoma Twilight does not project the traumatic farm crisis image that dominated the media in the 1980s. With the contrasting understandings of the generations, the insiders' views of change become plausible and real to the reader. While older people tend toward nostalgia for the past, the few who are under 40 express more prosaic realities: "I don't try to attach that much sentiment to anything, because I'm just going to try to survive," says a 32-year-old Iowa State University graduate who returned to Waucoma to farm (131). The values of the American cultural mainstream have

overtaken the younger adults, and the excitement of shopping trips to urban malls and the local absorption of media culture lay bare the dissolution of the contained rural community.

This book presents an authentic, nonromantic rural Iowa that may be too real for those looking for the comforting agrarian images of fortitude, independence, and plenty. Although Schwartz has culled her photographs and interviews to present a coherent story, it is as close to being the raw data of ethnographic fieldwork as we find in published form. The documentary quality of the book underscores its authenticity. It also limits the analysis, even as it invites readers to their own understanding—or to arguments.

And I do argue with some points that seem uncritically presented. The common belief that Iowa farmers were once independent of the capitalist marketplace does not fit with historical facts. The material on the rise of external influences is presented as if there were prior pristine rural sentiments independent of wider social messages—as if the traditional church, for example, did not constitute an external influence. While middle-class rural people tend not to acknowledge the saliency of social class, the omission of the voices of rural poverty feeds into its own myth.

But my arguments arise out of the richness of the description. This is a book to think about, to argue with, and to put into various theoretical frameworks. Anyone who reads it will come away with a deeper and more active understanding of rural Iowa.

Black Eagle Child: The Facepaint Narratives, by Ray A. Young Bear. Foreword by Albert E. Stone. Singular Lives: The Iowa Series in North American Autobiography. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992. xv, 261. Illustrations. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY FRED MCTAGGART, KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN

In the early 1970s, when I undertook a study of Mesquakie stories for my Ph.D. dissertation, Ray Young Bear, a.k.a. Edgar Bearchild, had just returned from Pomona College and was enrolled as an undergraduate at the University of Iowa. My somewhat naive goal, presented many times to Young Bear, was to put the stories of the Red Earth People in a meaningful context so they could be preserved by the Mesquakies and understood by the Euro-American culture. As Ray politely declined to collaborate officially in my project, I was struck by his strong ties to home and family. He seized every possible opportunity to accompany me on my trips to the

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